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SECRETARY of Defense Robert McNamara stated an American dilemma very well in his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee when he deplored the release of so much secret testimony on military matters.

The secretary announced he has appointed Lt. Gen. Joseph F. Carroll to devise ways of reducing the release of information that could be "of benefit to our potential enemies."

He appears to have had considerable support from senators on the committee. Chairman Richard B. Russell said few citizens, if any, want to know "the number of hydrogen bombs or the number of divisions, or even the fact that Charleston, S. C. is the only place where we can load (missiles on) a Polaris submarine."

All this is an understandable reaction. However, in light of the Cuba fiasco, it begins to appear as if some Administration officials are already seeing in that affair the possibility of a clamp-down on legitimate Pentagon information. Such action, however, would not prevent "leaks" of information to favored congressmen or to news sources by armed services partisans anxious to protect and promote their own special weapon, idea or appropriation.

At one point, Secretary McNamara said "Why should we tell Russia that the Zeus developments may not be satisfactory? What we ought to be saying is that we have the most perfect anti-ICBM system that the human mind will ever devise. Instead, the public domain is already full of statements that the Zeus may not be satisfactory, that it has deficiencies."

In this case, the proposed treatment is worse than the ailment. In place of an overly frank statement on the status of the

Zeus anti-missile missile, the public is to be lulled to complacency by reassuring words that all is well. Such a state of complacency is hardly one in which the public will be disposed to make the sacrifices which it has been told may be necessary. And the reawakening will be a rude one indeed.

Patriotic Americans do not want every detail of our national security to be made public. But they have a right to know at least as much as is readily available to the prospective enemy. They do not want to be fed a diet of pap.

In many cases, it will be sufficient if the peoples's representatives in Congress are given the facts to make legislative decisions wisely.

Sen. J. William Fulbright, (D-Ark.) chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was consulted before the ill-fated Cuban invasion, master-minded by the Central Intelligence Agency. He apparently raised cogent objections, although as a patriotic American, he did not make them public in advance. If more Congress members of his stamp had been consulted, the disaster might have been averted. No national administration is wise enough to act properly in every case, without intelligent and informed criticism.

As President Kennedy has recognized, there is no substitute for a vigilant, informed public in a democratic society. A public kept uninformed by its leaders may be in mortal danger of losing not only the capacity to wage a war between a free and a slave society, but also the capacity to distinguish between them.

This editorial also appeared in the following other newspaper :

DECATUR HERALD, ILL. - MAY 12, 1961